



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**COMMISSIONERS AWARD \$7 MILLION TO NATIONWIDE
CHILDREN'S COLLABORATIVE TO FIGHT PREMATURE BIRTHS**

*New Community Partnership Targeting Maternal Interventions Aims to Help 1,100
Mothers and Their Babies*

Columbus (December 9, 2009) – Saving the lives of children is the goal of a \$7 million announcement today by Franklin County Commissioners Paula Brooks, Marilyn Brown and John O'Grady. During a press conference this morning, Commissioners announced their intention to provide \$7 million over five years to fund clinical research and community outreach efforts to prevent premature births, the leading cause of death for newborns in Franklin County.

The funding will support a new community prevention initiative – Ohio Better Birth Outcomes (OBBO) – which is a collaborative effort between the county's health systems, government and community organizations.

According to a report released today by Nationwide Children's Hospital, preterm birth (the birth of infants before 37 weeks gestational age) is the largest contributor to infant mortality, accounting for almost one-third of infant deaths. Franklin County, like the other large metropolitan areas in the state, has high preterm birth rates that have increased substantially since 1980.

- The county's preterm birth rate of 13 percent is almost double the U.S. public health goal of 6.9 percent and higher than the state overall, costing businesses, government and families emotionally and financially.
- In high risk populations in Franklin County, the preterm birth rate is as high as 20 percent.

"Premature birth is costing the lives of our children and causing family grief and tragedy we cannot measure," said Commissioner Paula Brooks. "We can measure the millions of dollars it is costing families and taxpayers – up to \$2 million for care over the life of a premature child. The premature birth rate of one in five for high risk mothers is one of the most serious health care challenges our county is facing. This is unacceptable"

“Through OBBO, we are partnering with Nationwide Children’s and its network of collaborators to make a difference in preventing premature child delivery in our community,” Commissioner Brooks said. “We will improve the well-being of our youngest, most vulnerable citizens and their families.”

OBBO was launched earlier this year bringing together local partners using the latest research to improve outcomes for high risk pregnant women and their children in Franklin County. Leading the effort are physicians and researchers from Nationwide Children’s Hospital, The Ohio State University Medical Center, OhioHealth and Mount Carmel Health System, along with city and government agencies, education and not-for-profit groups. The partnership of all the health systems in a single community the size of Franklin County is an unprecedented level of collaboration for an effort of this kind.

Nationwide Children’s Hospital CEO Dr. Steve Allen was joined by OhioHealth’s CEO Dave Blom and Claus Von Zychlin, CEO of Mount Carmel Health System at today’s announcement.

“Columbus is unique in our shared commitment to the best possible outcomes for children and families, nowhere else in the country is there such a comprehensive and collaborative effort underway to reduce prematurity,” said Steve Allen, MD, CEO of Nationwide Children’s Hospital. “This would not be possible without the commitment and support of our County Commissioners and our other partners. Together, we will redefine what is possible in reducing preterm births and their consequences.”

OBBO is focused on specific interventions for high risk pregnant women and new mothers that have strong empirical data suggesting they may reduce preterm morbidity and mortality. Early results include doubling the number of women receiving 17P, a hormone therapy that can reduce recurrent preterm births in women with a history of spontaneous preterm delivery. Nurse-Family Partnership, another component of OBBO, has reduced preterm birth rates among participants by 8.4 percent compared to a control group. The financial impact of this is substantial, given that the costs of an infant admitted to neonatal intensive care units in Franklin County ranges from an average \$66,000 up to more than \$2 million.

A portion of the funding from the Board of Commissioners will support the work of OBBO with \$500,000 in 2010 and a total of up to \$3 million over five years. This will enable OBBO to reach 1,100 high risk pregnant women and new mothers in Franklin County.

“The fact that preterm birth is the largest contributor to infant mortality, accounting for almost one-third of infant deaths in Franklin County is staggering,” said Commissioner Marilyn Brown. “We must, as a community, work together to address the immediate and long-term health, developmental and economic consequences of premature births so that we can lessen the financial and emotional burden on our youngest residents, their families, local governments and non-profits.”

We're committed to strengthening Franklin County's families," said Commissioner John O'Grady. "Funding from the County will address this complex issue in a collaborative manner to ensure the well-being of pregnant women and babies and, at the same time, support the employment of thousands of employees in the medical field."

The remaining \$4 million commitment will support an enhanced focus on prematurity research. The Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital identified prematurity as a key part of its strategic plan and funding will support a comprehensive study of prematurity including basic and clinical research studying its causes and complications.

To view a copy of the new Ohio Better Birth Outcomes report, visit www.nationwidechildrens.org and keyword search *OBBO*.